

WILLIAM BREWSTER — AN APPRECIATION.

BY JOHN GEORGE GEHRING.

To appear before this body of Nature Lovers in an attempt to pay loving tribute to the memory of such a man as William Brewster, many of you having had your own relations of intimate friendship with him for years and some from boyhood, might seem like an intrusion under ordinary circumstances; but the circumstances are not ordinary when it is William Brewster of whom I speak! We all knew him to be a man of a wonderfully rich and many-sided character,— and we all know that to merely say how we loved him and shall always revere him, does not lift the weight of an irreparable calamity that has befallen us. Nevertheless it seems imperative as well as a precious privilege that I, at his own request, may be permitted, through your Journal, to give expression to what lies in my own heart.

On the eleventh day of last July William Brewster breathed out his last earthly hour in his tree-embowered chamber in his home in Cambridge. During the last weeks of his final illness it was my great privilege to be many hours by his side, to listen to his words, to return the glances of his friendly and trusting eyes, and to minister to him with such little attentions as one who loves his dearest friend, whom he is about to lose out of his earthly life, eagerly desires to bestow.

Through all those swiftly passing days the voices of his beloved birds came through the open windows of his chamber, and spoke to him through the ever-receptive senses of his bird-loving soul. Almost to the last conscious hour the notes of the robins never failed to elicit a recognition or some sign of pleasure. Indeed, to the sympathetic few who hovered around him, even after he had ceased to be perceptive of the environment of the room and his friends, it seemed that there still remained open the door that led to his love for the birds, for he ever appeared to be conscious of their movements and their notes, and often his countenance would faintly lighten with the recognition of their calls after he had become too feeble to utter words.

Lover of birds and animals and flowers,— and equally lover of his kind,— a rare and singularly beautiful soul was William Brewster, and a priceless privilege it was to be permitted to count him as a friend. A man wonderfully modest for one endowed with so great a store of Nature's lore, and unusually shy and timid in the imparting of the seemingly inexhaustible knowledge he so richly possessed. A man who won all hearts that came under the spell of his voice and presence or upon whom his eyes rested with their message of friendly understanding. "Who is your friend with the kind eyes?" asked of me not infrequently by friends who saw us together, was no unworthy tribute to this man who had the power to make friends by virtue of some subtle innate quality that directly appealed to those fortunate enough to meet him.

William Brewster did not need to commune with his friends in words. His was the rare gift of intuitive communion, and to be in his presence was to those who knew him best the privilege of interpreting a common thought by means of that rarer sense which is far more subtle than anything the clumsy medium of words could convey. What was this potent charm possessed in such marvelous degree by this dead friend of ours? Why were we compelled to love him,— what drew us to him with a feeling of tenderness akin the love of woman,— why did we give our implicit trust as though it were a matter beyond question that we should uncover our hearts to this unassuming man? Was it not that William Brewster was one of those men whose innate honesty and sincerity of soul spoke for itself in every act, in every thought he uttered,— that his relations with his fellow men were of the simplest and most direct,— that he had no guile and no distrust,— but interpreted all others by the light of his own transparent soul and heart and imputed to others only that which was mirrored in his own nature?

His was a character beautifully free from every taint of coarseness. His heart and soul shone through eyes as pure as those of a child. His conversation dealt with things that were beautiful and his soul loved the beauty that is portrayed in Nature with a life-long and all-embracing passion. To be in his companionship was to be at once lifted away from all that had little worth and to dwell upon the beauty and wonder of things that endure. Whoever of his friends had the opportunity of seeing and hearing William Brewster

deal and talk with a woodsman, guide or any of the simpler folk in the humbler walks of life with whom he came in contact during the many years wherein he studied birds in their haunts, but felt the charm with which he made that man feel at ease and upon a level of common manhood. And indeed, this was not manner in the least,—it was but simple sincerity.

From all men did he feel that he could learn, all men did he respect, and with all men did he feel as man to man. It was instantly apparent that he was one who took for granted the common manhood between them and who therefor brought out from them only that which was fine and true. The mere mention that one was a friend of his was to open the way to their hearts, and the claim of his friendship anywhere was a title to respectful recognition. What could we more earnestly desire for ourselves than that our own names might be as touchingly inscribed upon the hearts of our fellows as this of our dead friend, who without knowing it, simply because of inherent human kindliness, enveloped himself in an atmosphere of graciousness and good will!

As his old-time physician as well as friend, I had watched with growing solicitude a condition of gradual but increasing disability for a period of over two years. The insidious disease, as yet unconquered by Science, which brought his earthly life to a close, made the outlook increasingly hopeless. As he sought help from various sources he bore with wonderful docility and patience the failure to receive relief. He clung to every alleviation as to a buoy by which his courage might be upheld, until there came a day and an hour which can never be forgotten, when from lips that loved him came the answer to those gravely questioning eyes! He bore the message bravely, though he longed to live. Then to the one for so many years nearest his life, he tenderly spoke of happy years, leaving messages with her for dear and intimate friends, and affectionately thanked the faithful attendant who had ministered to his comfort. It will suffice to say that with a calm and simple resignation, with the dignity of soul that was his when in the midst of strength and the abundance of life, William Brewster accepted the inevitable, and his last days were mercifully veiled by unconsciousness as he drew near to the portal of the Great Unknown.

William Brewster had the Listening Soul! Of all things did he

receive testimony and to all things did he accord a hearing that was fair and just. He hastened to no conclusions and he was ever ready to modify his opinions in the light of farther evidence. His was a nature innately fair and truthful and whilst ever fearlessly uncompromising wherever principle was involved, personally he judged not at all! To be as broadly tolerant as this our loved and honored friend, to be as considerate and fair, as intrinsically friendly towards the opinion of all men, regardless of station, has been an ideal to us all since first we knew him.

O thou lover of all things true and good, upon what far heights today thy soul doth stand, we rest assured that one so fitted to be immortal,— has found his immortality!

Bethel, Me.

WILLIAM BREWSTER.

At a regular meeting of the Nuttall Ornithological Club held November 3, 1919, the following memorial of Mr. William Brewster was adopted by the Club for entrance in the Records, and the Secretary was instructed to communicate it to 'The Auk' for publication. It was prepared by Mr. E. B. White.

William Brewster was one of the founders of the Nuttall Ornithological Club and its President for over forty years, and when not absent from Cambridge, was found faithfully in the Chair at its meetings. His scientific attainments have made their own permanent record, but the Club wishes to record here the sense of the heavy loss it has sustained and of the intimate personal bereavement which the members suffer in the death of one who was held by them in such affectionate regard.

He presided with an easy control, with no trace of self-assertiveness, his poise rendering that unnecessary: perfect balance marked his character; he possessed vigor without asperity and sensibility without softness. Tolerant and just, he infused into the meetings

a feeling of mutual consideration, and that without any sacrifice of effectiveness, and at the same time his kindness and his urbanity created a feeling of fellowship that rendered the gatherings peculiarly pleasant. Debatable matters he directed with a notable sense of fair play that assured full hearing for all sides; ornithological discussion he conducted with patience and acumen. He gave consideration to any observations, desirous that all who were present should participate in proceedings; and he listened to a contributor of even the most trivial notes with an absorbed, respectful interest. His sympathetic responsiveness and enthusiasm were sources of inspiration to many a younger ornithologist. We, who have for many years enjoyed his conduct of the meetings, carry ineffaceable in our mind his handsome, mobile countenance, which would light up some remark with an engaging smile of appreciative humor, or enforce some searching question with a piercing glance.

The fact that Mr. Brewster was never ruffled sprang from goodness of heart and lack of self-consciousness. He seemed gratified by opportunities to be helpful, and generously gave counsel and information to friends and strangers alike. Wide knowledge he seemed to hold in trust; and personal detachment made his decisions worthy of confidence. Very naturally, then, he was constantly consulted.

Great was the importance to the Club of the ready information which extensive experience and tenacious memory enabled him to supply off-hand. Even greater, because rarer, was the importance to it of the spirit with which he imbued it. The meetings have been held for many years in his private museum and are remembered with delight which is measurably due to his gracious bearing; and no occasions are remembered as more significant than those — all too few — when he contributed the formal paper of the evening from the day-to-day entries in his journal. Even then was strikingly felt his gift of felicitous expression, for his style was not only a sound scientific medium but was elegant and vivacious, vibrant with the joy of his chosen pursuits.

William Brewster grew upon his friends by intimacy, for even the most intimate discovered no traits save such as increased their love and esteem.

THE WILLIAM BREWSTER MEMORIAL.

At the regular stated meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union, held in New York City, November 10, 1919, the following communication from friends and co-workers of William Brewster was received and the trust therein described was formally accepted by the Union. [Ed.]

The undersigned co-workers and friends of William Brewster, in recognition of the great service which for nearly half a century he rendered American ornithology, present to the American Ornithologists' Union, as Trustees, the sum of five thousand dollars to establish the "William Brewster Memorial."

The income of the Fund shall be used to defray the cost of a gold medal, to be known as the Brewster Memorial Medal, to be awarded every two years to the author of what, in the judgment of the Council of the Union, is the most important work relating, in whole or in part, to the birds of the Western Hemisphere, during the period in question. The remainder of the accrued income of the Fund, after defraying the cost of the medal, shall be given to the recipient of the medal as an honorarium.

In case the award is made for the joint work of two or more persons, to each of whom credit is due in equal share, a medal shall be given to each of them and the honorarium shall be divided equally between them.

In case the Council decide that no work has been produced that is of sufficiently high scientific quality to be worthy of award of the medal, the income accrued during the period shall be added to the principal of the Fund.

In case at any future time it becomes the opinion of two-thirds of the members of the Council of the Union, that an amendment of the terms of this deed of gift would result in the better attainment of the fundamental purposes of the Memorial — which are the perpetual honoring of the memory of William Brewster, and the encouragement of study of American birds by the bestowal at intervals of a medal and honorarium as recognition of ornithological research of high scientific quality — such amendment may

be made by the same methods then in force for the amendment of the By-Laws of the Union, but in no other way.

All details of the administration of this fund shall be wholly under the control of the Council of the Union, any provision of the By-laws of the Union to the contrary notwithstanding.

A sketch for the proposed William Brewster Medal has been designed and contributed by Daniel Chester French, which is acceptable to Mrs. Brewster and to us, and we trust will meet with the approval of the Council.

It is recommended that the award be made at the meeting of the A. O. U., at intervals of two years, the two-year period to end June 30 preceeding the A. O. U. meeting of that year, the first award being made at the meeting of 1921.

It is recommended that the President of the Union shall appoint a committee, of three persons, to recommend the award of the medal and honorarium. This appointment to be made during the first week in July preceeding the A. O. U. meeting at which the award is to be made. The report of this committee will be presented to the Council at its Stated Meeting for acceptance or rejection. In the event of its rejection the Council shall have power to make the award.

Having stated the general understanding under which the fund for the William Brewster Memorial was raised, we feel confident that we may leave the formulation of the additional details under which it may be administered to the good judgment of the Council of the Union.

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